

Message Text

PAGE 01 SEOUL 03296 091005Z

17

ACTION EA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9968

C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 3296

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, KS

SUBJECT: INTERNAL POLEMICS SUBSIDE

REF: (A) SEOUL 2933 (B) SEOUL 3063 (C) SEOUL 2890

SUMMARY: ROK INTERNAL POLITICAL SITUATION HAS REMAINED UNUSUALLY QUIET FOR LAST TWO WEEKS, WITH ROKG AND OPPOSITION SIDES AVOIDING HARSH CRITICISM OF EACH OTHER. TRUCE SEEMS TO BE LARGEY RESULT OF WIDESPREAD CONCERN AMONG OPPOSITION ELEMENTS OVER ROK SECURITY SITUATION AND RESULTING HESITANCY TO PRESS ROKG AT THIS TIME. GOVERNMENT, FOR ITS PART, SEEMS GENERALLY SATISFIED WITH OPPOSITION ATTITUDE. END SUMMARY.

1. BEGINNING WITH NDP LEADER KIM YONG-SAM'S APRIL 24 PROPOSAL TO MEET WITH THE PRESIDENT AND THE CONCOMITANT AGREEMENT TO FOREGO POLEMICS (REF A), THE SEOUL POLITICAL SCENE HAS REMAINED UNCHARACTERISTICALLY QUIET. PRESIDENT PAK CONTRIBUTED TO THE RELATIVE CALM WITH HIS APRIL 29 SECURITY ADDRESS, WHICH MANY PROMINENT OPPOSITION FIGURES SAW AS A REASONABLY MODERATE, RESPONSIBLE CALL FOR SELF-CONFIDENCE AND UNITY AND AS A WARNING TO THE NORTH. THE FACT THAT

MANY PEOPLE HAD EXPECTED THE ADDRESS TO ANNOUNCE
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 SEOUL 03296 091005Z

NEW RESTRICTIVE MEASURES AS HOME PROBABLY HEIGHTENED THE FEELING THAT THE MESSAGE HAD STRUCK A MODERATE AND EVEN CONCILIATORY NOTE. (REF B).

2. ANOTHER ELEMENT OF CALM HAS BEEN THE UNIVERSITY SITUATION. SEPARATE FACULTIES AT VARIOUS SCHOOLS HAVE BEGUN TO OPEN FOR CLASSES, SO FAR WITHOUT UNTOWARD RESULTS. OPENINGS OF MORE POLITICALLY ACTIVE FACULTIES ARE EXPECTED TO CONTINUE TO TAKE PLACE PIECEMEAL IN THE NEAR FUTURE. WE HAVE HAD REPORTS THAT MOST STUDENTS WILL RESUME THEIR STUDIES AND AVOID DEMONSTRATING, AT LEAST FOR THE TIME BEING. ONE REASON FOR THE EXPECTED CALM IS THAT MANY OF THE ANTI-GOVERNMENT STUDENT ACTIVISTS HAVE ALREADY BEEN EXPELLED. ANOTHER IS THAT MANY STUDENTS ARE REPORTEDLY CONCERNED THAT THE SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS RAISED BY INDOCHINESE DEVELOPMENTS AND THE INCREASED THREAT FROM THE NORTH WOULD MAKE DEMONSTRATIONS AT THIS STATE APPEAR IRRESPONSIBLE.

3. THIS CONCERN EXTENDS TO OTHER OPPOSITION ELEMENTS AS WELL. ALL OF OUR NDP CONTACTS, FOR EXAMPLE, GENUINELY BELIEVE THAT A MORE TENSE SECURITY SITUATION HAS BEEN CREATED IN KOREA BY INDOCHINESE EVENTS AND BY THE KIM IL-SONG VISIT TO PEKING. ALTHOUGH THEY STILL BELIEVE THAT PRESIDENT PAK TENDS TO EXAGGERATE THE THREAT, THEY FULLY BELIEVE THREAT IS A REAL ONE. CHURCH GROUPS, TO, HAVE TEMPERED THEIR CRITICISM OF THE GOVERNMENT, APPARENTLY IN VIEW OF THE NEED TO PRESENT A UNITED FRONT TO THE NORTH. AT THE SAME TIME THERE HAS BEEN SOME ATTEMPT TO OPEN DIALOGUE BETWEEN RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND THE ROKG. RECENTLY, FOR EXAMPLE, THE RETIRED ARCHBISHOP OF SEOUL, NO KI-NAM, CALLED ON PRESIDENT PAK. THE PRESIDENT REPORTEDLY TOLD HIM THAT HE WOULD TAKE A CONCILIATORY POSITION TOWARD THE CHURCH IN RETURN FOR CHURCH SUPPORT FOR THE CURRENT NATIONAL SECURITY AND UNITY DRIVE.

4. APART FROM THE SIGNIFICANTLY LOWERED DECIBEL LEVEL IN ROKG-OPPOSITION EXCHANGES, EFFORTS ARE CONTINUING CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 SEOUL 03296 091005Z

TO OPEN SOME KIND OF POSITIVE DIALOGUE. WHILE THE PROPOSED MEETING BETWEEN PAK AND KIM YONG-SAM IS FAR FROM A CERTAINTY, BOTH SIDES CONTINUE TO MAINTAIN SOME HOPE THAT IT CAN TAKE PLACE IN THE NOT-TOO-DISTANT FUTURE. AT THE SAME TIME, THE GOVERNMENT PARTIES AND THE OPPOSITION SEEM TO BE CLOSE TO AN AGREEMENT TO OPEN A SPECIAL SESSION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WHICH WILL DISCUSS AND PERHAPS PASS ADDITIONAL SECURITY MEASURES WHICH WOULD BE BASICALLY ACCEPTABLE TO BOTH SIDES.

5. MEANWHILE, THE GOVERNMENT IS TRYING TO FOSTER THE APPEARANCE OF UNITY, BOTH FOR INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL

(PARTICULARLY PYONGYANG'S) CONSUMPTION. DAILY
RALLIES URGING UNITY AND NATIONAL SECURITY
CONTINUE ON THE PART OF BUSINESS, SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS,

SCHOOL FACULTIES, ETC. A RALLY SUPPOSEDLY INVOLVING
A MILLION PARTICIPANTS IS SCHEDULED FOR THE LARGE
YOIDO ISLAND SQUARE IN SEOUL ON MAY 10. ADDITIONALLY,
A NEW COUNCIL FOR NATIONAL SECURITY HAS JUST BEEN
FORMED INCLUDING SUCH WELL-KNOWN SPONSORS AS NDP
VICE SPEAKER YI CHOL-SUNG, CHRISTIAN DISSIDENT
LEADER KANG WON-YONG, FORMER DEMOCRATIC PARTY
LEADER PAK SUN-CHON, AND SUCH ORGANIZATIONS AS THE
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES. WHILE GOVERNMENT
PRESSURES ARE OBVIOUSLY AT WORK HERE, THE EFFORT
IS PRODUCING THE IMPRESSION THAT POLITICAL ELEMENTS
ARE CLOSING RANKS TO A CERTAIN EXTENT IN THE
INTERESTS OF INTERNAL STABILITY.

6. COMMENT: WE CONTINUE TO REGARD PRESIDENT PAK
AS PRONE TO AUTHORITARIAN MEASURES, PARTICULARLY IN
THE FACE OF A PERCEIVED SECURITY THREAT. WE THUS
CONSIDER THAT HE IS FULLY PREPARED WHEN HE DEEMS
IT NECESSARY TO RESUME THE TOUGHER TREND WHICH HAD
BEGUN TO EMERGE IN MID-MARCH (REF C). FOR THE
TIME BEING, HOWEVER, IT APPEARS THAT THE OPPOSITION
IS ITSELF IMPRESSED WITH THE NEED FOR MODERATION AND
IS NOT INCLINED TO ENGAGE IN POLEMICS, WHICH IT
BELIEVES MIGHT SEND THE WRONG SIGNALS TO PYONGYANG.
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PAGE 04 SEOUL 03296 091005Z

AS LONG AS THE OPPOSITION ELEMENTS ARE WILLING TO
MAINTAIN THIS POSITION, THE INTERNAL TRUCE HAS A GOOD
CHANCE OF HOLDING.
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